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Nomination Hearing (1985)

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1985

# Curran, Edward: Humanities Chairman Nomination Hearing (1985): Correspondence 19

Phyllis Franlin

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MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

62 FIFTH AVENUE

NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10011

20 September 1985

The Honorable Claiborne Pell  
United States Senate

Dear Senator Pell:

I enclose for your information a copy of a letter to Senator Orrin G. Hatch. It may be that Mr. Curran does not share the negative views of research-oriented scholars held by Senator Hatch. We would be grateful, therefore, if you would seek from Mr. Curran a response to questions like the following.

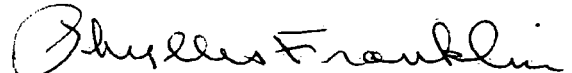
What, in the nominee's opinion, were the causes of the decline in enrollments in the humanities in the 1970s?

What, in the nominee's opinion, are the strengths and weaknesses of American higher education?

What does the nominee think the role of scholars should be in directing academic programs in American colleges and universities?

I assure you that those of us at the MLA have been most grateful for your strong support of the humanities. It was a great pleasure to meet you.

Sincerely yours,

  
Phyllis Franklin  
Executive Director

# *National Federation of State Humanities Councils*

12 South 6th Street

Suite 527

Minneapolis, Minnesota 55402

(612)332-2407

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July 16, 1985

Senator Orrin Hatch  
Chairman

Senate Committee on Labor and  
Human Resources

SD-428 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Hatch:

Thank you for your interest in the qualifications for membership on the National Council of the Humanities and for the chairman of the National Endowment. I appreciate the opportunity to respond to your questions.

I would like to answer questions 1-8 together. Our state humanities council is made up of a combination of people. Approximately one half are those whose paid employment has been in the humanities and one half public citizens who have had life long interest in and experience with the humanities on a volunteer basis. We work very hard to achieve a balance even within these two categories. Therefore, we have university professors from various fields of the humanities and representatives of institutions, such as libraries and museums, all with humanities Ph.D.s. Among our public members, we search for those who have shown leadership in their community and who employ the humanities in their work and volunteer activities. We include in this category businessmen and women, high school teachers, media persons, ethnic and minority leaders and so forth. This combination, we believe, provides a very healthy, dynamic base for making decisions on humanities policies.

The ideal composition of the National Council on the Humanities would be a similar balance of professional and public members, all dedicated to extending an understanding of and contact with the humanities to all of our citizens.

9. Should persons who have advocated publicly certain policy positions on controversial issues, e.g. for or against abortion, be nominated for the Council?

The last series of questions pertain to the qualifications of the person who is to be considered to be Chairman of the National Endowment on the Humanities (NEH).

10. In your opinion, should the Chairmanship of the NEH ever be held by a person whose employment has not been directly connected to the humanities' field, e.g. banking, business, etc.? Why or why not?

11. In your opinion, should the Chairman of the NEH ever be a person whose contact with the humanities has solely been as a volunteer, i.e. in a not-for-pay position? Why or why not?

12. In your opinion, would a person be qualified to be NEH Chairman who has had little or no employment or volunteer experience in the humanities, i.e. just an ordinary, upstanding citizen? Why or why not?

13. In your opinion, would a person whose employment had largely been in the elementary education community be qualified to be Chairman of the NEH? Why or why not?

14. In your opinion, would a person whose employment had largely been in the secondary education community be qualified to be Chairman of the NEH? Why or why not?

15. In your opinion, should the Chairman of the NEH have a Ph.D. in a humanities field? Why or why not?

16. In your opinion, should the Chairman of the NEH have written scholarly work in the humanities and had it published? Why or why not?

17. In your opinion, should the Chairman of the NEH have taught humanities in the post-secondary education system? Why or why not?

18. In your opinion, should the Chairman of the NEH have done paid academic research in the humanities? Why or why not?

19. In your opinion, should a person ever be nominated to be NEH Chairman who has publicly advocated a certain policy position on a controversial issue, e.g. for or against abortion, abolishing a certain government agency, etc.?

20. In your opinion, what would be the ideal background for a Chairman of the NEH?

Senator Hatch  
July 16, 1985  
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Question 9 is difficult to answer categorically. Our Founding Fathers took positions on controversial matters. Some of the greatest works in the humanities were produced in response to controversial issues. It would be dreadful indeed to have a national council composed of people who were not willing to take a stand or make their beliefs known. However, the guiding line could, once again, be that word balance. If the members are known for their outspoken views on single issue controversies, they are not likely to be equipped for making good general policies on the humanities. However, if they have been thoughtful contributors on many issues of concern in our national debates, and if they have conducted their discussions in a considerate manner, I feel they should not be excluded from the council.

Again, I choose to respond to questions 10-20 together. The NEH is an agency which administers many different programs in the humanities. The chairman should have proven administrative skills and demonstrated an ability to inspire and lead large numbers of personnel with varied background and duties.

While a Ph.D. and professional career in the humanities need not be required, as it is not required in the presidency of several of our large and prestigious universities, the chairman should inspire confidence in his or her understanding and appreciation of the humanities. The chairman should be able to define and articulate a national policy for the celebration of our cultural heritage. The chairman should have national renown for integrity and leadership.

Again my thanks to you for your belief that the humanities are necessary to the citizens in a democratic society.

Sincerely,

Nancy Anderson Stevenson  
Illinois Humanities Council and  
Federation Board of Directors